



A Mission in the World – an interview by Archbishop Hilarion of Volokolamsk to Expert magazine, Issue No. 23 (661) 15 June 2009

- Your Eminence, one hundred days have passed since the enthronement of Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia. What has changed in church-society relations since? Have any new tendencies emerged?

- Ascended to the throne of the Moscow Patriarchate is a man who has been known for many years as a missionary and enlightener. He has long been in active cooperation with all parts of the civil society, conducting a TV program of his own and making regular appearances in the print media. Even before he was elected Patriarch, he was known and loved by millions of Russian Orthodox faithful throughout the world. He has gained authority in broad public circles. A unique experience Metropolitan Kirill accumulated during his work at the Department for External Church Relations and through his close cooperation with the late Patriarch Alexy II has fully prepared him for the new role he assumed upon his election to the Moscow Patriarchal throne. But the most important thing is that he is a man who is absolutely committed to the Church; there is no private agenda for him. He has put down all his abilities and talents at the feet of Christ, as St. Gregory the Theologian put it.

Patriarch Kirill's enthronement has given a new impetus to the entire complex of relations between the Church and the world external to it. Patriarch Kirill tends to issue challenges to the clergy and the whole Church in a very tough and clear way. At the same time, he is a church leader not only because of his position but also by virtue of his personality. He can inspire people, mobilizing them to a more pro-active missionary and educational work.

- In your view, what are essentially the changes introduced by the Patriarch?

- Our problem is that we are still lacking in bridges linking Orthodox parishes to the outside world.

Actually what happens to a person who enters an Orthodox church for the first time out of curiosity or inner dissatisfaction or in search for the truth? Nobody will touch him at best. He will be given an opportunity to stand and listen to the service, to look around, etc. But, coming in touch with God's grace and church atmosphere, he may come to feel something. And he will come again and, later, again. Then he will begin searching for books. In this way, gradually, through self-education, he will get involved in the life of the Church. It is a very long and not easy way. A person will have to surmount his own

numerous barriers separating him from the church world – barriers psychological, cultural and linguistic.

At worst a newcomer coming to a church from the street will encounter ordinary rudeness. He would be scolded by the babushka who serves behind the candle box. She would condemn him for making the sign of the cross in a wrong way, for standing at a wrong place, for wearing wrong clothes, etc. And after coming to church two or three times, the person will lose any interest in coming back.

We have to break down this mechanism of alienating people from the Church or expecting indifferently that they will come and surmount all the barriers on their own. We should create such a system as to help people without much church experience to get involved in church life gradually. The resources of clergy alone are insufficient to do it. We need active lay people. Our task is to mobilize the laity for pro-active missionary and educational work. I do not mean that this work is absent altogether. It certainly exists. There are many people who work in this area, helping the clergy to bring people to God. But we need a completely different scale of this work.

- Is there a gap emerging now between the Patriarch's rhetoric and the real work of parish priests?

- Much depends here on the personality of the priest and the ruling bishop. If the missionary spirit coming from the Patriarch is not taken up properly, if lay people and clergy rely on the proposition that 'we bear witness to the truth of Orthodoxy by the very fact of our existence', then I believe the task of bringing new people to the Church will be unfeasible. This proposition is usually put forward to counterbalance Protestant and sectarian preachers. Indeed, we do not go from door to door inviting people persistently to come to church. That is to say, we do not use aggressive and importunate methods of mission. But it does not mean that we must simply sit and wait doing nothing until people themselves come to us. If the apostles had settled down in the Cenacle after the Resurrection of Christ in the belief that they 'bore witness to Christ by the very fact of their existence', I am afraid Christianity would have died in the first generation. But the Saviour's disciples went out to the world and this predetermined the universal triumph of Christianity in the world.

- The Patriarch's recent meetings with young people – is it an attempt to point to new ways of developing church-society relations?

- The Patriarch sets an example to the whole Church. But a single person is not sufficient to carry out the truly titanic work that is necessary for a real initiation of society to the Church. It is very important that the missionary imperative be felt deeply and accepted on other levels, those of bishops, priests, lay people and monastics. The Patriarch's call to pro-active stand in life and to dynamic preaching of Christ and Christian moral values should inspire all members of the Church.

- Today there is a lot of youth movements who march streets with slogans calling, say, 'to rebuff' homosexuals. Participants in such actions claim to be Orthodox. Are they 'those active lay people' whom the Church needs?

- No. Active does not mean aggressive. Active is a person for whom faith in Christ stands first and who builds his life on the basis of Christian values. An active lay person is inspired by the religious ideal not only within church walls but also in everyday life and seeks to build it in accordance with the gospel's law. He should not be necessarily a missionary in the purely technical sense, walking around and preaching. He must first of all bear witness to Christ by his way of life, his actions and his good works. 'In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven' (Mt. 5:16) – these words of Christ were addressed to all Christians, who are called to become the salt of the earth and the light of the world (cf. Mt. 5:13-14).

An aggressive stand however is completely inappropriate for the Church. We should struggle with sin in all its manifestations, but first of all in ourselves and only after that in people around us. It is certainly easier to struggle with sin in others than in ourselves. We must and can help our neighbours and generally people around us, doing it in the first place through our own example and way of life.

The Church states very clearly that sin is sin. The Church is against accepting sin as a norm. But we should not be hostile to people leading sinful life, because sin, from the Christian point of view, is an illness. And we should treat such people as ill, that is, be compassionate and tolerant towards them. We should struggle with sin but be compassionate to a sinner. Compassion does not consist either in saying to an ill person that he is healthy and does not need any treatment or in prescribing medicines to him. On the contrary, compassion consists precisely in calling an illness and illness, in making the right diagnosis and proposing medical assistance. In this lies the mission of the Church. John Chrysostom described the Church as a spiritual hospital. The Church is a place to which people come for healing. Our task is to heal the spiritual illnesses of individuals and society, doing it by no means in an aggressive way.

- How do you plan to develop a system of church education? Indeed, it makes it possible to train clergy capable of carrying out a more active work with the world, on the one hand, and secular and religious education come in little contact professionally, on the other...

- There was a hot debate in the Church about whether theological schools should be accredited to ensure that their graduation certificates are recognized by the state. The opponents of accreditation made this case: if our diplomas are recognized by the state, then our seminarians will not join the clergy but upon graduation will rather go into the world. I would give this response to this: if a person does not

want to join the clergy, he will not do it anyway, be his diploma recognized or not. But if a person is a theological graduate, say, from St. Tikhon's Orthodox Humanitarian Institute, and becomes not a priest but an active layman, for instance, a minister or a cultural worker, what's wrong with it? The Church should enlighten the whole world. And the task of theological education is to cultivate people who would become the salt of the earth – in parishes or in administrative offices. These are people who should be present in various spheres of public life and in various walks of life and should be missionaries as the apostles were.

Because of this polemic a decision on the accreditation of theological schools was actually postponed for a few years. It is only now, with the coming of a new Patriarch, that this work has been fully resumed and I hope it will succeed.

It is my conviction that we should expand the framework of church education and should not be afraid that people we cultivate do not become priests standing at the altar but become secular specialists with a good theological education, serving the Church in their own way in their own field. These people will become our, if you will, 'agents of influence' in the world and they will help to bring Christian moral values to those sectors of society which may not be directly reached by the preaching and mission of the clergy.

- What is your view of the church-state relations as they were before the 1917 Revolution? Today there is a popular nostalgia for those times as a certain ideal...

- If it were all so good in the pre-revolution Church, people would not fall away from it en masse in the revolutionary and post-revolutionary period. Perhaps there would be no revolution at all. It seems to me that the cause of the spiritual crisis that led to the revolution is very well exposed by Protopresbyter George Shavel'sky in his memoirs. He was the leader of the army clergy; he was close to the tsar's family and met personally with the tsar. He knew the Church very well at its every level. His memoirs represent essentially a selection of facts. They point to an enormous spiritual decay that existed both in the Church and the Russian state. He shows a great distance which separated the tsar's family and the people in spite of the ardent love they had for the people and desire to become akin to them and to understand them. He shows a gap that existed between the Church and its supreme leaders, on the one hand, and the real world, on the other. Certainly, there were many positive things in the pre-revolutionary status of the Church in the state. But on no account we should try to restore the pre-revolution situation today. We should create a new model of church-state relations to exclude those negative things in church and public life which had led to the revolution.

- Today the liberal part of society maintains that the state becomes ecclesiastical and inclined towards Orthodoxy as almost a state religion. But isn't there a different tendency

acting up, when the Orthodox Church is leaning against the state? Don't you see here a threat as to the ability of the Church to have an independent existence and independent policy?

- In my view, nobody is leaning against anybody today, either the Church against the state or the state against the Church. There is separation between church and state, which is reflected both on legal and political levels. The state does not interfere in the internal life of the Church. The Church does not participate in political struggle, nor does it support any particular party. The Church is open to relations with all. Any political figure, be he etatist or oppositionist, can be a member of the Church.

I do not think the state runs the risk to become clerical, while the Church state-run. But at the same time it should be taken into account that the popular term 'multiconfessional state', which is often used in Russia, fails to point to the obvious reality that most of people in Russia belong to the Russian Orthodox Church, even if they are not regular church-goers. About 80 percent of citizens in Russia identify themselves with the Orthodox Church. It means that the Russian Church is a majority religion. At the same time there are millions of people in Russia who belong to other confessions or profess no religion. We should respect and be friends with all. We should create a common cultural space. It should not be forgotten that it was the Orthodox Church that made a decisive influence through centuries on the formation of the spiritual identity of Russia and the Russian people.

- But you cannot deny that there are certain solid ties between the Church and the state.

- The Church and the state have very many common tasks with regard first of all to the spiritual and material welfare of our citizens. There are tasks which cannot be done single-handed, for instance, the population problem. It cannot be solved only through material benefits or TV public service advertising. What is needed here are joint efforts of the state and the Church. And when I am speaking of the Church I refer to the Church's cooperation with traditional religious confessions. In this regard, representatives of traditional religious confessions have very close and sometimes even identical views.

- Patriarch Kirill's recent remarks about the victory in the Great Patriotic War have provoked rather harsh criticism coming also from those close to the authorities. The Patriarch was criticized for seeing the victory as a miracle, while the war hardships as retribution for apostasy. The Patriarch was also criticized for underestimating the role of Stalin and the Bolsheviks. To which extent are you ready to oppose this criticism?

- I am ready to oppose it and so much as to provoke a wave of criticism against myself by stating my own view of Stalin. I believe that Stalin was a monster, a spiritual cripple who created a horrible anti-humane system of governance built on lies, violence and terror. He unleashed genocide against his own

people and is personally responsible for the death of millions of innocent people. In this respect Stalin is quite like Hitler. Both brought so much grief into this world that no military or political successes can redeem their guilt before humanity. There is no essential difference between the Butovo firing ground and Buchenwald, between GULAG and Hitler's system of death camps. And the number of victims of Stalin's repression is quite comparable with our losses in the Great Patriotic War.

The victory in the Great Patriotic War was really a miracle because Stalin did before the war all that was possible to destroy the country. He eliminated the whole army top leadership and by his mass repression put once a powerful country on the brink of survival. When a census was carried out in 1937, it was found the country was a dozen of millions of people short. Where did these millions vanish? They were eliminated by Stalin. The country entered the war almost bleeding white. But despite all the flagrant repression, the people showed unprecedented heroism. It cannot be called other than miracle. The victory in that war is a victory of the people who showed the greatest will of resistance. The miracle of victory in the war is a great manifestation of our people's fortitude which could be crushed by neither Stalin nor Hitler.

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